

**CHAPPAQUIDDICK: WHERE TED KENNEDY WRECKED HIS CHANCES OF BECOMING
PRESIDENT**

An Honors Thesis (HONR 400)

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May 29, 2018

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2018

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Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of Edward Kennedy's wreck at Chappaquiddick on the rest of his political career. This wreck proved to be extremely controversial, as Kennedy could not provide a coherent story as to how the wreck occurred or why Mary Jo Kopechne was in the car with him and not rescued as the car sank into the water. By examining Chappaquiddick's impact on Kennedy's presidential hopes, I consider the importance of perceived morality in a presidential candidate. This paper includes the presidential elections from 1968 to 1980, including an examination of Chappaquiddick's impact on Watergate. Information has been found in primary and secondary sources, including books, newspapers, memoirs, and Internet archives. This paper argues that even the most popular political figures are not above moral reproach from the American public. Edward Kennedy's wreck at Chappaquiddick was the true end of Camelot and ruined any chance that he had of following in his brother's footsteps as President of the United States.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Dr. Bruce Geelhoed, my professor and supervisor through this process, for his patience and guidance through the thesis process and for pushing me to expand my paper and make it better.

I am also grateful to my family and friends who encouraged me to continue writing when the process seemed difficult.

Finally, I would like to thank God for providing the skills and intelligence necessary to complete this thesis.

Process Analysis

This research thesis was a long but meaningful process. My vision for this paper included a wide range of topics, and through the writing process, I had to learn how to fit the pieces together. Due to the current political and social climate that has recently seen an explosion of harassment accusations and controversial moral leadership, this paper seemed like a timely topic. Through analyzing Edward Kennedy's wreck that left a young woman dead, I have endeavored to provide an objective account of what happened on July 18, 1969. My primary objective was to analyze how this popular candidate's perceived moral inadequacies affected his chances of becoming President of the United States. Through this process, I also tied in a discussion of Kennedy's influence in Richard Nixon's downfall through the Watergate Scandal. The paper covers Kennedy's entire life but is primarily focused on 1963-1980. It provides evidence that Kennedy's mistakes at Chappaquiddick ruined his chances of becoming president.

I began this endeavor during the summer of 2017. During this summer, I read through two biographies about Edward M. Kennedy. As I read, I took notes about Kennedy's life and career. Throughout the year, I supplemented these notes further as I gathered more information about Kennedy. After getting a general understanding of Kennedy's life, the accident at Chappaquiddick, and Kennedy's political career after the accident, I began to find books that helped me focus on different aspects of my paper. Dr. Bruce Geelhoed continually offered suggestions to me during the research stage of the writing process. He recommended most of the books that can be found in the bibliography of my paper. As I read different

sections of various books, I focused on the wreck itself, public opinion, and future political races. As mentioned, I continued to add information to my notes. By the end of the process, I had eighteen pages of notes that were color-coded by source and organized by topic. This process was helpful to me because I had never had to organize a paper that was this long before. These notes made it much easier to transfer the knowledge I had gained into my paper.

After turning a rough draft into Dr. Geelhoed, his most important observation was that I needed to use more primary source documents in my paper. After hearing this, I used the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum's website to find oral histories about the accident. I also found articles from the New York Times online and read parts of Jimmy Carter's memoir. Finally, I used microfilm that I got through an interlibrary loan to gain access to the Boston Globe from July 19, 1969, to early August 1969. This process of finding primary source documents improved my thesis paper significantly and was a worthwhile process.

I have always been confident in my ability to write engaging academic papers. This thesis was a challenge for me mostly because of the length and scope of it. I quickly learned that I would need to be organized if I wanted to research for a few months before writing the actual paper. It was a much different process than taking a week or two to get through the entire writing process. My organization, therefore, along with my planning and ability to synthesize ideas improved due to the process of writing my thesis paper. This was a valuable process about an interesting topic, and I am proud of my final product.

Chappaquiddick: Where Ted Kennedy Wrecked His Chances of Becoming President

Few families have climbed as high or sank as far in American history as the Kennedy family. The decline of Camelot occurred over several years, from John F. Kennedy being assassinated to Robert Kennedy being assassinated and with several other tragedies in between. The death of his three older brothers eventually left Edward M. (Ted or Teddy) Kennedy alone to carry the burden of continuing on in the Camelot legacy. Ted would not go without his own fair share of tragedies, however, the greatest of which being his wreck at Chappaquiddick. This wreck resulted in the death of a young woman, Mary Jo Kopechne, who had worked for Robert Kennedy's campaign before he was assassinated. Many would consider this fateful occurrence in July of 1969 to be the true and definitive end of Camelot. There would never again be a strong chance of a Kennedy becoming president. Ted Kennedy's presidential hopes died along with Mary Jo Kopechne, and he was never able to live down the mistakes he made that night.

Edward Moore Kennedy was born on February 22, 1932. His father, Joseph P. Kennedy often pointed this date out to others, as it was the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth. A Kennedy, Joe believed, would be the first Irish Catholic American president.¹ His dreams first fell on his oldest son, Joe Jr. When Joe Jr. died in combat in World War II, the expectation fell to John F. (Jack) Kennedy. Jack was elected president in 1960 but was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, on

¹ Bella England et al., *Last Lion: The Fall and Rise of Ted Kennedy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 11.

November 22, 1963. Next, Robert was expected to save the Kennedy legacy, so he ran for president in 1968. Tragically, he was also assassinated. The expectation then fell to the last hope at saving the family's legacy, Ted Kennedy. Ted, however, was the youngest of the Kennedy brothers and the one who was the worst in school and the best at finding trouble. He was the last of the brothers that the family expected to be president someday, yet that dream never really died until late in Ted's life.

Ted's early life was an easy one. As the youngest of the family, he was easygoing and received everyone's love and attention. His first public embarrassment came when was expelled from Harvard for cheating on a Spanish test. Worried about flunking off the football team if he did not receive a score of at least a C-, Ted asked a friend to take the final examination for him. Unfortunately for the duo, the graduate assistant who collected the tests recognized what they were doing. They were expelled and told that they could reapply for admission in a year or two, assuming good behavior.² Even this event turned out well for Kennedy, however, as the newspapers handled the news kindly, and he was allowed to reenter the school after an easy tour of duty in the Korean War.³ When he received a ticket for reckless driving without a license in 1960, the news was kept out of the

² Adam Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy: A Biography*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 17-8.

³ Ibid, 36-40.

newspapers until Joe Kennedy could create a positive story that could mitigate the damaging news.⁴

Ted's political life began in 1958, as he campaigned for his brother Jack's reelection to the Senate.⁵ According to Bella England, "Joe was impressed with his youngest son's flair on the trail and often remarked that he was the most natural politician in the family."⁶ Yet, as the youngest in the family, he was expected to campaign on behalf of the others rather than running for office himself. Ted was eventually elected to the Senate himself in 1962, after running for Jack's newly vacated seat. The power of the Kennedy name became more apparent than ever as his opponent, Eddie McCormack, correctly pointed out, "If your name was Edward Moore, with your qualifications, your candidacy would be a joke."⁷ This comment was meant to call attention to Ted's lack of experience in the political realm and challenge his popularity by claiming that it came primarily from his last name. After defeating McCormack, Ted's first few years in the Senate were difficult, as he found out about Jack's assassination and was in a plane crash that nearly killed him and

⁴ England, *Last Lion*, 54.

⁵ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 25.

⁶ England, *Last Lion*, 59.

⁷ Ibid, 84.

left him in very bad shape.⁸ Yet, he felt at home in the Senate and seemingly “did not share his brother Jack’s irresistible compulsion to become president.”⁹

This indifference to the presidency was forced to change when Robert Kennedy was assassinated on June 5, during the 1968 presidential campaign. Ted was still in the hospital, mourning his brother’s death, when a Democratic leader, Allard Lowenstein, told him, “Now that Bobby’s gone, you’re all we’ve got... Take the leadership.”¹⁰ Initially, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley offered Kennedy the vice presidential nomination on Hubert Humphrey’s ticket. Kennedy quickly turned down the vice presidential nomination, and later turned down the presidential nomination as well. When asked why he would not run in 1968, he claimed, “This was Bobby’s year.”¹¹ Additionally, his mother, Rose Kennedy, advised strongly against running in 1968. She believed that a Kennedy should not run in a last-second, desperate attempt at winning. She did not want her youngest son’s victory to be seen as a product of his older brother’s tragedy. Kennedy, therefore, decided to not be involved with the election in any way. He announced this intention in a speech only one week before the national convention.¹² Yet, a spontaneous

⁸ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 58-9.

⁹ Edward Klein, *Ted Kennedy: The Dream That Never Died* (New York, Crown Publishers, 2009), 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 69.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 72.

¹² Jack Olsen, *The Bridge at Chappaquiddick* (New York: Ace Books, 1970), 48.

Kennedy boom sprang up at the Democratic Convention, complete with buttons and signs.¹³ This movement would not be successful, however, and Kennedy did not find himself on the losing Democratic ticket of 1968. According to John Davis, "And even with Nixon not yet sworn in, Washington started to focus on Kennedy as his likely opponent in four years."¹⁴

With the weight of his family's and his country's expectations on his shoulders, he began to look toward the presidency after the 1968 election. He surpassed both of his brothers in Senatorial prominence, as he became the youngest ever Majority Whip at age 37.¹⁵ According to one poll in July of 1969, almost 80% of voters believed he would be the Democratic nominee for president one day. Even Richard Nixon was fixated on him as a threat.¹⁶ According to John Davis, "By the summer of 1969, Kennedy was clearly the man of the hour in the Democratic party, destined, without question, to be his party's candidate for the presidency in 1972."¹⁷ The Kennedy dynasty's last hope seemed to be on the brink of a total family revival.

¹³ Theodore White, *The Making of the President, 1968* (New York, Atheneum Publishers, 1969), 280-1.

¹⁴ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 129.

¹⁵ John Davis, *The Kennedys: Dynasty and Disaster, 1848-1983* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984), 575.

¹⁶ England, *Last Lion*, 145-6.

¹⁷ Davis, *Dynasty and Disaster*, 575.

All of this changed, however, with “the true ending of the Camelot legend.”¹⁸ No one knows for sure the specifics of the events at Edgartown, Massachusetts, on July 18, 1969. What Americans do know is that a young woman, Mary Jo Kopechne, drowned in Ted Kennedy’s car after being driven off the side of a bridge.

On the morning of July 19, Robert Samuel and Joseph Capparella decided to fish in Poucha Pond, where they saw something strange: a vehicle was flipped over in the water. When the police and firemen investigated, they found a woman’s body, in a fixed position and stretching for air.¹⁹ The car was quickly identified as Kennedy’s, but no one initially thought that it could have been Kennedy driving. After all, he had a chauffeur and rarely drove himself. Additionally, no one had reported this accident, and the car had clearly been in the water for several hours. Over the course of the next day, it became clear that Kennedy had indeed been driving the car. What was not clear, however, was what exactly occurred that night. Only an incomplete and questionable story can be crafted.

Ted Kennedy came to the island, Martha’s Vineyard, for the Edgartown Regatta that July. Kennedys had been sailing in the Edgartown Regatta for more than thirty years.²⁰ This year, a party was being thrown to thank five women who had worked hard for Bobby’s campaign before he had been assassinated. The

¹⁸ Thomas Maier, *The Kennedys: America’s Emerald Kings* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 532.

¹⁹ Olsen, *The Bridge at Chappaquiddick*, 104-15.

²⁰ Ibid, 71.

amount of alcohol consumed that night is a matter of question, as is what happened between Kennedy (a married man) and Mary Jo Kopechne (a single woman) before the accident. These aspects of the story are especially questionable due to Kennedy's reputation for alcoholism and womanizing. While Ted was not as big a womanizer as some of the other Kennedy men, he was also not as good at hiding it. Additionally, by the time the American public found out about the other Kennedy men's exploits, only Ted was left to take the blame.²¹ For these reasons, the country was highly suspicious of what transpired in the hours preceding the crash. When Mary Jo's body was found, she was wearing a blouse, slacks, and a bra, but no panties. Her blouse had grass stains on the back, but other than that, she was still well put-together.²²

Kennedy approached Jack Crimmins, his chauffeur, at the party and asked him for the keys to his vehicle, claiming that neither he nor Kopechne felt well.²³ In a later testimony, Kennedy would claim that he was going to take Kopechne back to her hotel, but he instead turned toward the beach because he got confused.²⁴ (The layout of the island can be seen on a map on page 26). Consequently, he drove over the side of Dyke Bridge at 20-35 miles per hour, where his Oldsmobile overturned in

²¹ Garry Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power* (Boston, Little, Brown, and Company, 1981), 56.

²² Davis, *Dynasty and Disaster*, 585.

²³ England, *Last Lion*, 151.

²⁴ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 141.

the water and began to sink as the windows blew out.²⁵ The pressure of the water thrust Kennedy out of the car, where he suffered a concussion before trying to save Kopechne eight or nine times.

Kennedy then ran to get help. As he was running, he passed both a lighted house and a fire station, but did not stop at either.²⁶ Instead, he told Joe Gargan, the Kennedys' cousin, and Paul Markham, a close Kennedy friend and former Assistant U.S. Attorney under Bobby, about the accident. These men neglected to relay this information to the proper authorities. According to Kennedy's later report, the three men once again tried to save Kopechne. Experts claimed that Kopechne likely survived for several hours after the accident, due to an air pocket in the vehicle. Kennedy made seventeen calls the next morning before talking to the police.²⁷ Nine hours after the accident, Kennedy finally went to the station and submitted a statement. Kennedy was able to wait so long to report the accident because he was absolutely certain about the loyalty of the other men involved. Instead of urging him to talk, they loyally kept his secret until a better plan could be formulated.²⁸ Many believed that the statement that Kennedy did finally report was insufficient to explain what happened that night. In subsequent days, the story would become

²⁵ Ibid, 141.

²⁶ Davis, *Dynasty and Disaster*, 581.

²⁷ Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *The Kennedys: An American Drama* (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 370.

²⁸ Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, 119-20.

even more confusing, as Kennedy changed certain aspects of what he had said earlier, and everyone else at the party stayed silent or made comments that did not fit with Kennedy's story.²⁹

Kennedy disappeared into the Kennedy home at Hyannis Port for three days after the accident, as reporters tore apart his statement to the police and conservatives called for his resignation from the Senate. The first time that he left the home was for Kopechne's funeral on July 22.³⁰ This would be the only time that Kennedy was seen wearing a neck brace. Kopechne's parents never publically spoke out against Kennedy. Instead, the matter was settled out-of-court for \$140,923 in insurance money. It is not known if any more money was ever given to the Kopechne's, but the press did later report that the couple bought a second home in the Poconos.³¹

On July 25, Ted Kennedy's trial took a total of nine minutes. He pleaded guilty to leaving the scene of the accident.³² Police Chief Dominick J. Arena was quoted saying, "If he sat in his house for five minutes without reporting the accident, he is in violation of the law."³³ After failing to report the accident for over nine

²⁹ Olsen, *The Bridge at Chappaquiddick*, 200-2.

³⁰ Ibid, 176-7.

³¹ Davis, *Dynasty and Disaster*, 586.

³² Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 146.

³³ Richard Powers and Alan Lupo, "Complaint Against Kennedy," *The Boston Globe*, July 21, 1969.

hours, there was no reason for Kennedy to try to plead innocent. No autopsy was ever taken on Kopechne to confirm if her death was indeed caused by drowning. Additionally, Kennedy was never required to take a breathalyzer, with Arena later stating that there was “no iota of evidence” that any liquor was involved.³⁴ The trial, therefore, failed to address any questions that remained in the public’s mind. Judge James A. Boyle ended the trial, claiming, “Where, it is my understanding, he has already been and will continue to be punished far beyond anything this court can impose, the ends of justice would be satisfied by the imposition of the minimum jail sentence and the suspension of that sentence, assuming the defendant accepts the suspension.”³⁵ Kennedy, therefore, “was given the benefit of every legal doubt while cooperating as little as possible with the investigation.”³⁶

That night, Kennedy gave a speech about the situation. In his grief, he had considered using this speech to resign from the Senate and give up on his political life. Ultimately, however, he chose to defend his actions in the speech and ask the people of Massachusetts to help him decide whether he should resign or not.³⁷ At first, this move gained Kennedy sympathy and compassion, as he had sustained a concussion and seemed remorseful about his actions. Soon enough, however, these reactions turned into extreme disdain and contempt.

³⁴ “Arena Blasts Rumor Mongers,” *The Boston Globe*, July 23, 1969.

³⁵ Olsen, *The Bridge at Chappaquiddick*, 218.

³⁶ Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, 122.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 222-6.

A bystander at the speech was supposedly quoted saying, "Too bad it happened. He might have been president." Kennedy quickly saw his "extremely favorable" ratings drop from 49% to 34%.³⁸ The bad reaction to the speech resulted in an inquest, wherein Kennedy's story changed once again.³⁹ Kennedy would go on to lose his position of Minority Whip later that year, and he would never attempt to gain another leadership position in the Senate.⁴⁰ For the first time in his life, the press Kennedy received was not kind. According to Adam Clymer, "Politicians and journalists used to argue that the personal lives of public men were irrelevant, that those details should be put aside in a separate box, taped and sealed, while only their civil life was judged. The accident at the bridge changed that, for the better or the worse, but forever. Chappaquiddick, as the voters understood it, excluded him from the presidency he might have won."⁴¹ The press essentially decided that Kennedy could not run for president. A poll in October of 1969 showed that 55% of Americans agreed that Kennedy "panicked in a crisis and should not be given high public trust, such as being president."⁴²

³⁸ England, *Last Lion*, 171-2.

³⁹ Davis, *Dynasty and Disaster*, 588-9.

⁴⁰ James Lange and Katherine DeWitt, *Chappaquiddick: The Real Story* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 164.

⁴¹ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 623.

⁴² Chris Matthews, *Kennedy and Nixon: The Rivalry That Shaped Postwar America* (New York, Free Press, 1996), 281.

The public was getting most of its information about Kennedy's accident and legal proceedings from major newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*. At first, the accident was somewhat overshadowed by the other major event of that July weekend: the moon landing. As the event unfolded and new information was revealed, however, *The New York Times* was there to publish it. The initial story, published just a day after the wreck was discovered, on July 20, followed in the old tradition of reporting kindly of Kennedy. For the most part, it objectively reported what happened. It also described the sharp turn right before the bridge and lack of warning sign in the area. The article then concluded with a list of Kennedy family tragedies, subtly linking Ted's wreck with his brothers' assassinations and the family's various plane crashes.⁴³

Another *New York Times* article, published on July 21, started to question how the wreck would impact Kennedy's political career, stating, "There was widespread speculation in the capital that Senator Kennedy's failure to report the accident to the police immediately, and other aspects of the case, could be detrimental to his political career unless they were immediately clarified."⁴⁴ Throughout the following week, the newspaper continued to update the story, while also pointing out several unknowns about that night. One article published

⁴³ "Woman Passenger Killed, Kennedy Escapes in Crash," *New York Times*, July 20, 1969.

⁴⁴ David Rosenbaum, "Kennedy's Career Feared Imperiled," *New York Times*, July 21, 1969.

anonymous thoughts from both Democratic and Republican leaders. Overall, Democrats were more confident that Kennedy could salvage his career, but only if he quickly explained exactly what happened that night, even if the story was as scandalous and immoral as many people were beginning to speculate.⁴⁵ These Democratic views were likely a result of the belief that, "As heir to this profoundly important national sentiment—simply as 'a Kennedy'—Edward Kennedy was the only potential Democratic nominee for 1972 who offered the possibilities both of victory and of pulling the warring factions of the Democratic party into a reasonably unified whole."⁴⁶

Even with this hope, however, newspapers across the country continued to question Kennedy's story and his character. In an article that provided excerpts from other newspapers across the country, *The New York Times* published an opinion piece from Buffalo's *The Evening News*: "For the moment, we would find it quite difficult to consider him seriously in the future as a potential candidate for President. His faltering emotional response and judgment over a considerable period of time here leaves overwhelming questions about how he might respond to far graver crises, affecting the entire nation."⁴⁷ *The New York Times*, therefore,

⁴⁵ E.W. Kenworthy, "Democrats Urge Kennedy to Speak," *New York Times*, July 25, 1969.

⁴⁶ Tom Wicker, "In the Nation: The Importance of Being Kennedy," *New York Times*, July 27, 1969.

⁴⁷ "Editorial Comment on Kennedy Speech," *New York Times*, July 27, 1969.

joined much of the rest of the nation in questioning Kennedy's ability to lead the nation.

The Boston Globe, a newspaper published a little closer to home for Kennedy, also extensively covered the story in the days following the crash. After being overshadowed by coverage of the moon landing, Kennedy began receiving more coverage, and the newspaper erred toward leniency for Kennedy. An early article about the crash reported, "Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, the only surviving brother in a family pursued by tragedy, narrowly escaped death early yesterday when his car plunged into a pond on a sparsely inhabited island off the coast of Martha's Vineyard."⁴⁸ Mentions of Kennedy's "tragic" life were not uncommon in the newspaper's coverage of the event. One article, entitled "A Battle With Doom," stated that Kennedy seemed to be "in mortal competition with an unlucky star."⁴⁹

Coverage of the event dominated *The Boston Globe* well over a week and into the following month. It covered every aspect of the wreck, investigation, and trial extensively. It provided articles detailing the legal processes and laws that applied to the situation, as well as why autopsies are important and why one should have been taken on Kopechne. Along with several opinion polls, the newspaper published the thoughts of senators and citizens on how the wreck would affect Kennedy's career in the Senate. The nation seemed to think that the wreck would

⁴⁸ Richard Powers and Alan Lupo, "Senator Wanders in Daze for Hours," *The Boston Globe*, July 20, 1969.

⁴⁹ John Robinson, "A Battle With Doom," *The Boston Globe*, July 20, 1969.

affect Kennedy's chances of becoming president more than it would affect his standing in the Senate. Finally, in anticipation of Kennedy's public statement following his trial, the newspaper published an article urging the public to feel compassion toward Kennedy and to withhold judgment until more facts came out.⁵⁰ It reminded the people that, "Mr. Kennedy has been a superb United States Senator, with a brilliant future ahead of him."⁵¹ After this speech, the articles in *The Boston Globe* worked to normalize the situation and pull attention away from the wreck by reporting about Kennedy's return to sailing and his political prospects looking forward. Over all, *The Boston Globe's* coverage of Kennedy's wreck at Chappaquiddick provided a thorough view at the facts, while also quietly supporting the Senator through presenting him as a victim overcoming the ill fate of his family.

Despite all of the backlash in the years following Chappaquiddick, Kennedy managed to return from this politically difficult time. He never lost the support of his Massachusetts constituents. In fact, "The name Kennedy has carried political magic in Massachusetts. So mesmerizing was the name that an unrelated young man with the same name as the late President managed, without any discernable credentials, to be elected State Treasurer repeatedly during the nineteen-fifties."⁵² Democrats recognized, however, that Massachusetts was not the nation, and there

⁵⁰ "Senator Kennedy's Accident," *The Boston Globe*, July 24, 1969.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² E.W. Kenworthy, "Democrats Uncertain of Kennedy's Future But see Long Road

Until He Regains Stature," *New York Times*, July 27, 1969.

would be a long road ahead before Kennedy could be a serious contender for the presidency in 1972.⁵³ Despite all that had happened, in 1972, Kennedy was still pressured to run for president. "All the reservations involving his age and experience had been washed aside by enthusiasm for running the last of the Kennedy brothers against Richard Nixon."⁵⁴ He quickly announced that he would not be running in the presidential election, but that he would remain in politics as long as he felt that he could be effective. Clearly Chappaquiddick weighed heavily on his mind as he turned down the nomination once again. An article published in *The Boston Globe* soon after the accident predicted this decision: "The wrong turn onto the dirt road has brought fresh tragedy upon the Kennedy family, but it may at least dispel the thoughtless pressures that have been pushing him towards an even more dangerous turn, a race for the presidency before he is ripe to hold the office."⁵⁵ Ted did not publically state Chappaquiddick as the reason for this decision, instead saying, "The uncertainties of higher office would place a great burden on my family."⁵⁶ Meanwhile, his mother publically declared that she could not stand

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Charles Bartlett, "Ted's Wrong Turn on a Lonely Road, *The Boston Globe*, July 24, 1969.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Matthews, *Kennedy and Nixon*, 164.

another tragedy like the deaths of his brothers. Privately, however, she told Ted, "There never has been a mother of two presidents... So get busy!"⁵⁷

Rose was not the only one who did not accept Ted's claim that he would not be running in 1972. Richard Nixon certainly remembered his loss to Jack Kennedy in 1960, and the threat of losing to Robert Kennedy in 1968. He remained completely paranoid of losing to the last Kennedy in 1972. As he wrote in a note to himself about Kennedy, "Defeat—doesn't finish a man—quit—does—A man is not finished when he's defeated. He's finished when he quits."⁵⁸ Nixon had been spying on Kennedy for years by the time of the election. He sent Tony Ulasewicz to Chappaquiddick to search for evidence to finish off Kennedy's presidential prospects once and for all.⁵⁹ He also sent men to follow Kennedy to try to catch him in compromising situations with women. Neither of these searches turned up with anything stronger than leaving the scene of an accident.⁶⁰ At the same time, however, Nixon pulled Kennedy aside after a Senate meeting and comforted him for

⁵⁷ Klein, *The Dream That Never Died*, 114.

⁵⁸ Stephen Ambrose, *Nixon. Volume Two: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972*

(New York, Simon and Schuster, 1989), 284.

⁵⁹ Matthews, *Kennedy and Nixon*, 19.

⁶⁰ Herbert Parmet, *Richard M. Nixon: An American Enigma* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 116.

thirty minutes, telling him not to let the tragedy get him down.⁶¹ It is clear that Nixon was a man conflicted by good morals and extreme paranoia that the whole world was out to get him. Soon, Nixon's fear got the better of him, and he ordered that all conversations in his office be recorded. He was "worried that liberal, pro-Kennedy historians and scholars would skew the accounts of his accomplishments in order to deny him proper credit," and so he decided that he had best be prepared.⁶²

Around this time, in June of 1971, the Pentagon Papers began to be released to the public. Nixon asked the courts to keep the Pentagon Papers wrapped up for national security at the same time that he was secretly circulating the papers to hurt Kennedy further, as the papers reflected poorly on John F. Kennedy.⁶³ Over time, Nixon became fully convinced that Kennedy was planning to run in 1972. The fear of Kennedy's candidacy ultimately led to the Watergate break-in on June 17, 1972. Eventually, the public would find out about Nixon's spying on Kennedy after Chappaquiddick, and they would link it to Watergate. H.R. Haldeman, Nixon's Chief

⁶¹ "Bryce N. Harlow Oral History Interview," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum 17 February 1977, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKOH-BNH-01.aspx>, accessed 19 October 2017.

⁶² Matthews, *Kennedy and Nixon*, 298.

⁶³ John Farrell. *Richard Nixon: The Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2017), 426.

of Staff, in a telephone call with Nixon, called it a “political embarrassment or public embarrassment,” but not a legal issue.⁶⁴

Kennedy soon became Nixon’s most vocal opponent. He began the investigation but was quickly taken off, as he was “too obvious a partisan, and too tainted by scandal to conduct an inquest.”⁶⁵ Eventually, his aggressive condemnation of Nixon would come to hurt Kennedy, as people began to revisit the incident at Chappaquiddick. Robert Sherrill, writing for *New York Times Magazine*, stated, “If Kennedy, who is now obviously making tentative runs at the Democratic Presidential nomination for 1976, should officially announce his candidacy, then the post-Watergate press would be obliged to subject him to the same demands.”⁶⁶ William V. Shannon of *The New York Times* agreed, noting, “In going over the side, Richard Nixon may have taken Edward Kennedy down with him.”⁶⁷

Kennedy did not let this new criticism take him out of the presidential picture. He started talking about running for president in 1976 soon after

⁶⁴ “Transcript of a Recording of a Telephone Conversation Between the President and H.R. Haldeman,” Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library and Museum 4 June 1973,

https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/watergate/wspf/039-080_039-081.pdf, accessed 19 October 2017.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 514.

⁶⁶ Matthews, *Kennedy and Nixon*, 338.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 341.

Watergate. In November of 1973, however, tragedy struck the Kennedy family once again. Ted's son, Teddy, had to have his leg amputated because of cancer. This, combined with the fear that the Chappaquiddick issue would defeat him before the race even began, caused Kennedy to stay out of the 1976 election.⁶⁸ Although Kennedy was not running against Jimmy Carter, Carter was certainly running against Kennedy. Much like Nixon, Carter never stopped believing that Kennedy would swoop in at the last second and steal the election from him. In September of 1975, Kennedy announced unequivocally that he would not run.⁶⁹ He assured the public that Chappaquiddick was not a decisive factor, nor were the many death threats that he was receiving, in making this decision.⁷⁰ Instead, he was not running due to family responsibilities.⁷¹ Ultimately, Kennedy campaigned for America's 39th president, Jimmy Carter.

Edward Kennedy's greatest chance of becoming president came in the 1980 election. By August of 1978, a *Time Magazine* poll showed that 79% of the American public did not believe that Chappaquiddick should be a factor when considering Kennedy as a possible presidential candidate.⁷² After the 1979 oil crisis, polls showed that Democrats favored Ted by a margin of 53 to 16 over presidential

⁶⁸ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 192-201.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 220.

⁷⁰ England, *Last Lion*, 197.

⁷¹ Klein, *The Dream That Never Died*, 132.

⁷² England, *Last Lion*, 205.

incumbent, Carter.⁷³ The presidential nomination was Ted's for the asking, or so it seemed.

On October 12, 1979, Kennedy began a round of interviews with Roger Mudd, a reporter for CBS News and an old friend of the Kennedys. Kennedy was completely unprepared when Mudd started out his questioning with the Chappaquiddick issue.⁷⁴ He also asked about the state of Kennedy's marriage, about his reputation for womanizing, and how he differed from his brothers. Perhaps the toughest question of all followed, when Mudd asked, "What happens, Senator, if some heckler stands up at a rally, a Kennedy rally, and says, you know, in the loud voice, red-faced, he's angry at you, and he says, 'Kennedy, you know you were drinking, you lied, and you covered up.' What—what are you going to tell him in a situation like that?"⁷⁵ After being surprised by the opening questions, Kennedy fumbled through the rest of the interview, not even being able to give a coherent answer as to why he wanted to be president.⁷⁶ These interviews then aired six days before his official announcement of candidacy, in November of 1979.⁷⁷ Many Americans missed the airing of the interview, due to an airing of the popular movie, *Jaws*. This proved to be even more detrimental to Kennedy, as his broken and

⁷³ Collier and Horowitz, *The Kennedys*, 430.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 431.

⁷⁵ Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, 152.

⁷⁶ England, *Last Lion*, 208-9.

⁷⁷ Klein, *The Dream That Never Died*, 144.

stammering speech was received more poorly in print form, as read in the newspapers.⁷⁸ The interviews would serve as an omen of what was to come. After his eventual withdrawal from the race, Kennedy would comment, "I always knew that there would be questions about, about the incident and about my family, but I had really expected that they would not persist the way they did."⁷⁹ Kennedy's 1980 campaign for president never came close to reaching the expectations that the entire nation seemed to have for it.

One issue preventing Kennedy from receiving the Democratic nomination was that his campaign had no central leadership, as Steve Smith, the Kennedys' brother-in-law and campaign manager, was gone for most of it.⁸⁰ Additionally, the campaign started late, not leaving Kennedy with time to poll, and Kennedy did not seem to have the desire and energy required to rally the people.⁸¹ Kennedy felt that he had to run because everyone assumed that Carter had to lose. For this reason, there was no reason to prepare for a hotly contested race.⁸²

Incumbent President, Jimmy Carter, would not lose his position of power without a fight, however. Before Kennedy even announced his candidacy for

⁷⁸ Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, 153.

⁷⁹ David Broder et al., *The Pursuit of the Presidency* (New York: Berkley Books, 1980), 73.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 145.

⁸¹ Collier, *The Kennedys*, 432.

⁸² Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, 293.

president, Carter's foremost concern was the power that Kennedy had over the media. According to Carter, "What made this challenge so troubling was that, as a Kennedy, he had instantaneous access to the news media, so that a critical comment that would be ignored from any other source would be given headline coverage."⁸³ When confiding his feelings about the matter in his diary, Carter wrote, "I would win in 1980 no matter who ran against me, I was going to fight to a last vote, and I had no timidity about Kennedy running or anyone else."⁸⁴ Carter, therefore, maintained confidence in his chances of success while also never underestimating the power of the Kennedy name. This healthy view of the race was most evident on September 17, 1979, when Carter wrote, "When the issues are debated we will be okay, but the weekend newspapers were unbelievable, practically anointing Kennedy as the president and claiming the 1980 election is already over."⁸⁵ As the election progressed, Carter's confidence only grew, and eventually, even the press had to give up on a Kennedy victory.

Despite earlier polls that indicated that Chappaquiddick would not be an issue, the American public was clearly not over the incident or the lack of clear answers that followed in the years after. The press continued to cover the issue frequently and new polls were negative for Kennedy. A Lou Harris poll in June

⁸³ Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010), 283.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 326.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 356.

showed that 23% of Americans would refuse to vote for Kennedy because of Chappaquiddick.⁸⁶ This showed early on in the primary race, as Jimmy Carter won 155 of the 169 delegates in Illinois.⁸⁷ Additionally, Carter would not help the situation, pulling out a character ad blitz after Ted won the primary nomination in New York.⁸⁸ These ads did not address the “alcoholism,” “adultery,” or “Chappaquiddick” problems directly, but instead referred to them collectively as the “character issue.”⁸⁹ Even the famous televangelist, Billy Graham, believed that no evangelistic group could possibly support Kennedy because of the “moral issue.”⁹⁰

Despite everyone’s hopes for 1980, Kennedy did not even receive the Democratic nomination. His sense of entitlement and underestimation of his opponent finally resulted in his defeat. The worst blow came with the Iran Hostage Crisis, which caused the American public to rally around Carter, their President.⁹¹ Ultimately, Kennedy lost 24 of the 34 primaries and 20 of the 25 state caucuses.⁹² He withdrew from the race on August 11, at the Democratic Convention, with his famous words, “For all those whose cares have been our concern, the work goes on,

⁸⁶ England, *Last Lion*, 211.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 223.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 224-5.

⁸⁹ Klein, *The Dream That Never Died*, 144.

⁹⁰ Carter, *White House Diary*, 367.

⁹¹ Broder, *The Pursuit of the Presidency*, 70.

⁹² Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, 6.

the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die.”⁹³ Kennedy’s dream of becoming president, however, was dead. Although he did not fully understand it at the time, that dream had died along with Mary Jo Kopechne at Chappaquiddick.

In the coming decades, there were many moments when it seemed as if Kennedy would make yet another attempt at the presidency. This, however, was not the case. He never again ran for the office. He announced in late 1985 that, “The pursuit of the presidency is not my life. Public service is.”⁹⁴ The rest of his political career would not go without its fair share of scandals. He continually faced the threat of opponents bringing up Chappaquiddick, something that he would never fully live down. Kennedy, however, would continue to be elected to the Senate, where he served until his death on August 25, 2009.

Today, Ted Kennedy is remembered for a lasting legacy of change in the Senate. In a 2003 interview, White House Correspondent Sid Davis put it this way: “That if you went up to the Senate and talked to people who know how to cover the Senate, who’ve been there for years, who know Washington, who know politics, I don’t care who they are, and you said who is the best out of the 100 senators, who is the best up there? I will guarantee you that every one of them will say Ted Kennedy. I will guarantee it. Even with the baggage he has from Chappaquiddick and all of

⁹³ England, *Last Lion*, 330.

⁹⁴ Klein, *The Dream That Never Died*, 155.

that, the fact is that he's got the courage of his convictions."⁹⁵ No one will ever know exactly what happened that night in Edgartown, Massachusetts. That leaves us to judge Edward Kennedy based on what we know he accomplished in his forty-six years in the Senate. This means that Kennedy can either be remembered for his impressive record of victories for the weak and marginalized in American society or for his infamous record of immorality and scandals. Only time will tell which legacy lives on for Edward Moore Kennedy.

⁹⁵ "Sid Davis Oral History Interview," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum 10 February 2003, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKOH-SD-01.aspx>, accessed 19 October 2017.

ILLUSTRATIONS

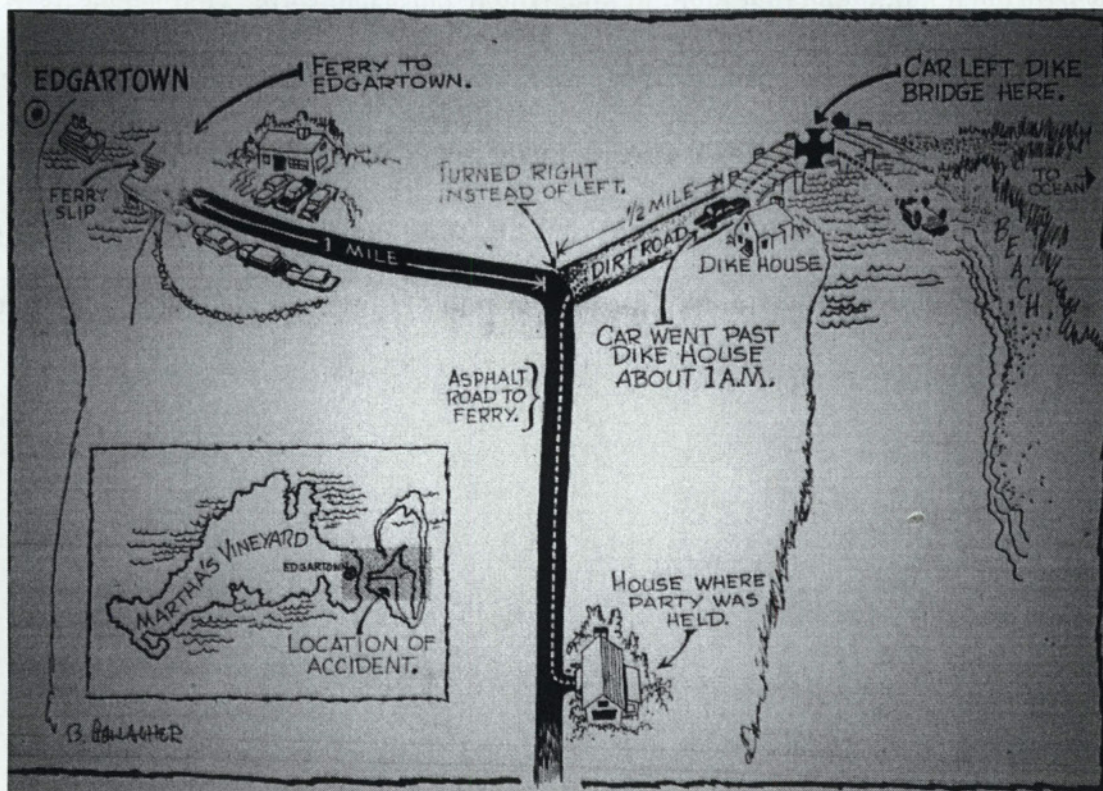


Fig. 1.

Gallagher, B. "Scenes of Island Accident." Map. In *The Boston Globe*, July 19, 1969.

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